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“Find Green: Connecting green-minded people with green-practicing businesses” Implemented by PCI Media

Project Summary - Part I. Description

Participating organizations and geographic location(s) of the project

The primary geographic focus for testing of the app has been Washington, DC, and also to a lesser extent in New York City. As this initiative grows, we will extend coverage to other - and eventually all - major urban areas in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Based on progress and success, we will also eventually work to extend coverage more broadly.

In addition to PCI Media, our main organizational partners at present are Conservation X Labs, Litterati, Ocean Foundation, Plastic Pollution Coalition, and Ecosia.

Background or problem statement (why was the project carried out?)

We are all making purchasing choices frequently over the course of any given day – think of coffee, restaurants, groceries, travel, and other services we spend money on – often with little thought to the environmental consequences of these decisions. If an increasing segment of these purchasing choices can be directed towards services that incorporate “green” thinking into their business practices, we can begin to bend the curve of current consumption and production practices towards environmental sustainability. There is growing demand for products and services that incorporate environmental responsibility into their business model. There is also mounting evidence that individuals are increasingly willing to go out of their way, and in some cases pay a premium, for goods and services that are environmentally friendly and which conform to their world view. We are already witnessing the success of such businesses as solar energy, electric or hybrid cars, and organic grocery stores. This growing number of eco-friendly businesses are critical to shifting the world to a global green (circular) economy that minimizes carbon emissions, air and water pollution, and non-renewable resource extraction. The Find Green App enables users to find and promote businesses that demonstrate sustainable practices, such as recycling or reducing plastic. We’re starting with coffee shops & cafes where customers can easily observe green practices, and we will steadily expand to other sectors.

A one-paragraph general description of the project (what was done?)

Find Green set out to develop an application for smart phones that will help to create a virtual world of environmental sustainability, where “green-minded” individuals can more easily find green-practicing businesses. Like a “Green Yelp”, the Find Green app is designed to enable users to find and promote businesses that demonstrate sustainable practices (e.g. recycling, energy efficiency, organic and local food, low plastic, etc.). Businesses are presented spatially with basic information (e.g. location, information on services, hours) as well as the ranking of their environmental practices, and further information on their sustainable practices should the businesses choose. The Find Green app is modeled after user-interface based rating systems for restaurants and other businesses (e.g. Yelp). In contrast to these platforms, the Find Green App will provide a rating of sustainability based on users’ responses to a series of simple questions tied to observable sustainability practices (e.g. Does the café use reusable plates, cups and utensils? Does the café advertise the food is locally sourced, organic or sustainably certified?). The responses will be the basis of a combined rating for the business that will be viewed as one to five green leaves.

A one-paragraph description of outcomes and follow-up (what did the project achieve?)

The main product from the project, and the primary achievement of this effort, is the development and testing of the app itself. The app may be downloaded from the development server on which it currently resides following the instructions provided in our most recent progress report. We will launch the app in iOS and Android platforms in early 2019, where it will be available to anyone, once final user experience upgrades are completed based on the results of the current testing phase. The Find Green app may be downloaded following the instructions as outlined in our previous progress report. Please ensure that you scroll the map to the Washington D.C. area where we are testing the app. The map will populate with businesses that are in the database and have been rated. Please let us know if you have any difficulty in downloading the app. The app currently resides on a development server, and we expect to launch the app on the Apple App Store as well as Google Play in the coming weeks. A number of communication products have also been developed as follows below.

Find Green Demonstration Video:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YEqeGOPIe3BfpYtYiwUFAYmvAQ2F1w7l/view?usp=sharing> Find Green Proposition Video: <https://vimeo.com/302231996> Find Green Presentation:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1h6QXOGR5YP5CC2SpGZHlfvssJVrIMy2g2BHGBbXY2Gk/edit?usp=sharing>

The long term vision of Find Green, however, is to act as a catalyst for "greening" the internet. Information resources on the environmental practices of businesses is often scattered, not easily retrievable (particularly in real time) or simply not available. In short, there is no "green layer" to the millions of on-line searches individuals conduct every day to find restaurants, cafes, hotels, and countless other information searchers and purchasing decisions across hundreds of retail sectors. Moving towards sustainable production and consumption patterns is essential to long term environmental, economic, and social stability - and in the near term to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Project Summary - Part II. Analysis Successes

The main success of the Find Green, of course, is that we have successfully developed and tested the app that we set out to create - and we are in the process of completing final refinements based on user experiences. As noted above, we have been very encouraged by the very positive feedback we have achieved from everyone we have come in contact with concerning this effort. This is, of course, just the beginning - as to make progress towards addressing unsustainable production and consumption is remains an as yet unfulfilled goal of this effort. As we know, the global economy today is largely based on a linear, take-make waste model in which over 60 billion tons of natural resources are extracted per year, and over 13 billion tons of waste are disposed into landfills, incinerators, and waterways. This process of mass extraction, industrial production, consumption and waste is accelerating and resulting in natural resource depletion, ecosystem degradation, release of hazardous chemicals into the soil, air and waters, GHG emissions and marine debris. These trends are predicted to increase. The good news is that there are solutions to these problems, and even better news is that there is growing demand for these solutions. The more we can connect green practicing customers with green practicing businesses, the more we will be able to move the needle from unsustainable production and consumption patterns towards more sustainable production patterns.

Challenges

The biggest challenge of the project was managing the app development process and keeping this on schedule, particularly with the departure of a key Team Member (as noted above) for a critical 2 month period. With an information technology project of this nature, coding expertise was required - which was not reflected amongst the skills of the Core Team Members or other advisers. The process of finding an app developer who was willing to take on the project proved to be more difficult and take longer than we had anticipated. In addition this first expert hired to develop the app - while having completed the minimum tasks outlined in the terms of reference - proved to be largely unable to capture the unique social and environmental nature of the initiative as we had hoped. This resulted in a renewed search for a second app developer (a task that was unanticipated in initial planning). We are happy to say, however, that the current app developer is more fully in line with the social and environmental nature of the initiative and has succeeded in achieving the majority of the design, features, and user experience that we wished to bring to the project. The challenges outlined above, however, resulted in unexpected delays in the

project - which in turn resulted in a number of the expected results not to have been completed, or not completed as fully as expected.

Lessons Learned

The most important lesson we have learned is that we recognize now that an interim development period over 1-2 years will be needed to expand the scope of Find Green to other sectors as well as expand the reach of Find Green to other cities, and in the process build a user community to a sufficient level to ensure long term sustainability and growth. We have also learned that a different development model may be needed to ensure that we are able to bring this project to scale within a reasonable timeframe. A key objective over the next one to two years will be to explore other development models which would allow the project to grow quickly and become self-sustaining.

What next?

As noted above, the immediate goal of Find Green is to complete testing of the beta app, initially focused on cafes in a single target city, and prepare an outreach, communications, and marketing plan for the next stage of development. We will also expand to other sectors and other urban areas across North America. Currently, Find Green is being developed on a not-for-profit model. This model is consistent with the views and vision of the Core Advisory Team members, along with the social and environmental nature of the initiative. Over the next phase of development, however - until mid 2020, the Advisory Team will explore how best to migrate Find Green to a social enterprise model which we believe will be consistent with our views and vision, while at the same time allowing for an opportunity to bring this effort to scale and ensuring long term sustainability. The Advisory Team believes that while we have developed a viable information platform that has proven itself in testing to be attractive to users and able to make a substantive contribution to addressing the environmental challenges we have targeted, the Team also believe that a subsequent development stage over approximately 18 months to two years is required to fully demonstrate scalability and to also generate a user base that will be self-sustaining and grow. We are currently seeking additional grant funding to complete this stage of development, and we have a number of good prospects for funding that we are currently following up.

For more information on Find Green, please contact:

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